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indirectly from the good will of his ancestral spirits whose benevolence Ego often invokes.

Ambivalence follows from other characteristics of the relationship. Resentment of Ego's depredations of her husband's property and jealous concern for the inheritance rights of her own children appear to be at least partially balanced by a share of the affection her husband shows for Ego. However, joking in this relationship is asymmetrical. The mother's brother's wife takes the more aggressive role, and from the vehemence of her joking, and the structural nature of the relationship, it appears likely that amity lies less heavily in the balance than hostility. The groups to which the two parties belong are equal in status. Their respective positions within them, of course, are not, and this is reflected in the aforementioned asymmetry. Each party is obviously independent of the authority system of the other.

Joking Between Siblings-in-Law

Siblings-in-law who joke are separated by the rule of sib exogamy observed among the Mossi. Reciprocity is basic to the marriage contract that unites their respective kin groups. Several factors tend to create ambivalence in the relationship. Both kin groups—in particular, the extended families of the two marriage partners—profit from the reciprocal tie established between them, but possible failure on the part of either group to reciprocate adequately, particularly with regard to marriage payments, constitutes a persistent source of potential friction. Moreover, the Mossi observe the levirate. Joking between siblings-in-law who are potential spouses, yet are presently constrained by a prohibition against adultery, has frequently been ascribed the function of reducing tension in a situation of conflict. The kin groups of siblings-in-law are always structurally equivalent because groups occupying significantly different strata in Mossi society do not intermarry. As members of autonomous descent groups the participants are obviously independent of one another.

Joking Between Sibs

Sibs (or lineages) whose members joke with one another are, of course, also separate groups.[2] They are always united by a strong tradition of reciprocal social and economic aid. Ambivalence apparently stems from the conflict between this tradition of reciprocity and actual competing claims to land. The origin of joking relationships between two descent groups is often ascribed to the alleged fact that, when they first arrived in the village, leaders of both falsely claimed to the chief that he and his kinsmen had arrived first, and thus had a prior right to land, and that the members of the other group were their slaves. Despite their jocular allegations, both groups are in fact structurally equal and independent.

Joking Between Age-Sets

Joking between age-sets within an age-grade varies with the generational

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tradition of hostility. Such groups obviously have both equal and mutually independent status.

The Processes of Mossi Joking

I have already suggested that the significance of joking as an adjustive mechanism is derived from the manner in which it provides concurrently for the operation of three interrelated but analytically separable processes. These are *communication, control,* and *catharsis.*

As a means of communication, joking provides a permissive and flexible context in which a grievance can be expressed, thus allowing for its rectification and the restoration of amity. As a means of control, the public nature of most joking serves to shame the object of the jocular offensive, to invoke social pressure for his conformity, and to elicit support for the complainant. As a means of catharsis, the joking expression of aggressive feelings reduces frustration and thus serves indirectly to perpetuate the amicable aspect of the relationship in which it occurs.

Joking also gives pleasure. The feeling of triumphant release that follows the successful—and safe—expression of hostile sentiments probably functions to reinforce reliance on joking as an adjustive mechanism. And the intrinsic pleasure of wit may also explain the persistence of joking behavior in the absence of an immediate "structural need" for it.

A more detailed description of one of the relationships already mentioned—sibling-in-law joking—will serve to illustrate these several points. Because of its relation to the pivotal institution of marriage, sibling-in-law joking is perhaps the most frequently used adjustive mechanism in Mossi social structure. The potential for marital conflict is high. This appears to be due to the combined factors of a sexually differentiated enculturative experience that results in marked dissimilarities in adult male and female personality; to an age difference between husbands and wives of at least ten years; to the classic stresses of polygyny; to the subordinate status of Mossi women, particularly of junior wives within their husband's patriclan; and to the possible dissatisfaction of a woman's parents, particularly her mother, at the loss of their daughter's services or at the inadequacy of bride-wealth payments.

Whatever its origins in a specific instance, it is important that this potential for conflict be controlled, for each marriage extends the network of affinal and cognatic ties that link the patrilineage to the larger community. Given a persistent potential for strife, the preservation of marital stability requires the provision of a means for minimizing its deleterious effects. When conflict occurs, the resultant frustration must be reduced, and accord must be reestablished in a manner that does no serious damage either to the marriage itself or to the larger context of social relations in which it is embedded. Sibling-in-law joking helps to accomplish this.

If, for example, a Mossi is irritated by his wife's performance of some aspect of her duties in the household or the field, he need not address her directly in order to communicate his dissatisfaction and release the tension he feels. To do so in a culture which places a high value on indirection in emo-

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ship itself and the contract of interlineage co-operation and solidarity which every marriage serves to establish or reinforce.[4]

Although this joking interchange is seen in its full implications when there is an immediate source of dissension between marriage partners, it may also occur in the absence of any specific difficulty. Then it is apparently indulged in simply because it is expected, and for the pleasure which the Mossi, like all people, derive from an occasion to exercise their wit. It is this relatively disinterested joking which has been most frequently described in the literature, and this may account for the failure of many scholars to perceive more fully the important social and psychological functions which joking may fulfill.

Conclusion

This paper has been written as a tentative step toward a reformulation of the various and disparate observations on joking contained in the anthropological literature. I have contended that an analysis of this literature indicates that wherever joking is institutionalized the structural relationship between the participants tends to be characterized by five significantly interrelated structural attributes: separation, reciprocity, ambivalence, equality, and independence. I have also indicated that such joking may serve as an adjustive mechanism by providing for the concurrent maintenance of communication, control, and the culturally harmless catharsis of potentially disruptive emotions.

A variety of forms of institutionalized joking found among the Mossi of Yatenga have been cited to illustrate these points. However, I suggest that the factors which cluster with this reliance on joking as an adjustive mechanism are not unique to the Mossi. Institutionalized joking reported for other parts of Africa appears to be structurally and processually similar.

NOTES

1. A shorter version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in San Francisco in November, 1963. It is based on field research conducted among the Mossi from 1954 to 1956 with the assistance of a Ford Foundation Fellowship.

2. Marriage between the members of descent groups united by a joking alliance is regarded by the Mossi as highly desirable, apparently in recognition of the useful role of joking as an adjustive mechanism. Once such a marriage is contracted, however, Ego and his wife must take care that their joking insults are directed only at the younger kinsmen of the other and that the insulting remarks are personal. It would, for example, be acceptable for Ego to call his wife's younger sister a disreputable shrew but dangerous to call her a slave (a term of disrespect used frequently in joking between sibs). To refer to her as a slave would cast unflattering aspersions on her entire kin group, including her mother and father, with whom, in their new status as parents-in-law, Ego may no longer joke.

3. I believe that joking is also institutionalized between the Mossi and the Yarse, a highly acculturated ethnic minority of Mande origin who live throughout Yatenga. There is also joking between the Mossi and the indigenous blacksmith caste. Unfortunately my data on these two instances of joking are inadequate.

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4. The importance of sibling-in-law joking as a means of regulating conflict in the Mossi marriage relationship is further substantiated by the results of comparative research conducted among the Mossi resettled at the Office du Niger in the neighboring Republic of Mali.

The Mossi, who were first forcibly and later voluntarily resettled in Mali, were allocated farm land as elementary family units without regard for their extended kinship affiliations. Thus a man often found himself living in unaccustomed "isolation," in the company only of his wife or wives and children, and otherwise surrounded by total strangers. Although the potential for conflict in the marriage relationship remained high, or was even augmented by the stresses of adjusting to a changed milieu, sibling-in-law joking, the institution through which such tension is traditionally regulated among the Mossi, was no longer operative. Unless the younger siblings of each spouse had accompanied them to the resettlement area, those individuals were absent to whom they might have communicated their grievances and expressed their aggressive sentiments in a socially harmless, psychologically satisfactory, and culturally acceptable way.

As the traditionally sanctioned means of dealing with tension resulting from marital conflict was no longer available to the Mossi resettled in Mali, there occurred an increase in the incidence both of violence in marital disputes and of separation and divorce.

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also lost much of their interest in preserving their genealogies. Their local 613
lineage segment, which controlled the village nam, still showed interest in 798
its genealogy, but the people of Godin did not quite remember how they were related to the ruling lineage segment. Several times in the recent history of Barkago (and other villages), the men who were given the village nam had to be recalled from distant villages where they were living with maternal patrilineages. So relatively unimportant was possession of the village nam without concomitant noble status that after Naba Ngado took over, the local Biligo people began to ignore all local genealogical records except descent from Biligo. The Ninisi people had the least reason to be interested in their genealogy, and they simply ignored it. They had been separated from the other Ninisi groups in the district for so long that they did not even forbid marriage into those groups.

In villages such as Barkago, the existence of several lineage groupings 613
and families of strangers facilitated local marriages. But in villages with 621
fewer lineage groups, the time came when all groups were so closely linked by marriage and affinal alliances that for all practical purposes the village became an exogamous unit. By 1956, this process had reached such an advanced stage in Barkago that hardly any marriages took place between the Ninisi and Biligo local lineage segments. Both groups were permitted to marry the local descendants of Ngado, because the latter were more recent arrivals in the village. These marriages were of great significance to all villagers because they linked the nobles and the commoners in a series of exchanges. Moreover, because the groups were linked through sisters' sons [565]
with special privileges in both groups, problems deriving from status dif- [606]
ferences were more easily solved. Even the most arrogant noble was often [607]
constrained by ancestral sanctions to maintain amicable relations with his in-laws.

The Biligo lineage of Barkago contracted marriages with the other, nonrelated groups within and without the district. The Ngado people did likewise. Whether these nobles were able to marry noble women of other districts is a moot point. Owing to distance and politics, no such marriages are known to have occurred, and no one seems to know whether they were permissible. The Ninisi, who had always been commoners, had the largest marriage circle of all the village groups. They were able to marry nobles, commoners, and the Ninisi of the district and other districts.

The inhabitants of a Mossi village built their houses and cultivated their 423
crops on land the village chief had granted to their respective lineages. 613
Since the royal lineage, by right of conquest, controlled all of Mossi country, the rights of usufruct of a lineage depended ultimately on the Mogho [643]

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the noble class, whose actions embody the ideology that the exercise of sovereignty is a corporate right which reverts to all of them when the head ruler dies. Much of this raiding is symbolic and does not interrupt market activities.

Many of the ceremonies connected with the funeral of chiefs and respected deceased elders take place in the market. Sometime between the interment of the dead person, the *keema,* and the first burial ceremonies, the sister-in-law *(dakia)* of the dead man in her role as joking relative—a role she plays until the funeral ceremonies are completed—impersonates him in the market place. On the day chosen for this rite the *dakia* dresses in the clothes of the *keema* and goes to market. While there, she acts as she observed her brother-in-law to have acted in the past: she circles the market and buys goods; she buys beer from his favorite beer seller and drinks with his friends; and for a moment, at least, she sits with his old cronies in their favorite haunts and takes part in their discussions. She may even be serenaded by *griots* who sing praises in honor of "her" ancestors, and she rewards them before leaving the market place that evening.

The market is the scene of an important ritual during the final funeral ceremonies, which are held about one year after a man was buried. On the morning of this ceremony the female relatives of the *keema,* led by his eldest daughter and his *dakia,* appear in the market and go from stall to stall buying all the things the deceased used in his lifetime. These include meat, *zumbala* (locust bean balls), cotton, tobacco, salt, kola nuts, peppers, *kumba* (a tomato), cakes, cooked millet-mush balls, potatoes, etc. When they have gathered all of these things, they retire to a spot near the market where they lay out all the foodstuff in baskets. In the meantime, the drummers play the royal airs, if the dead man was a chief, or ordinary rhythms if he was a commoner. Then the *keema's* eldest daughter places a basket on her head and, accompanied by four men, leads a procession of drummers and of the other women, also with their baskets, around the market. While this procession is circling the market three times in honor of the deceased, the *dakia,* carrying a very old basket containing the stalest food she could find, weaves back and forth through the marching throng making a nuisance of herself. After the third round the marchers return to their assembly point whence the eldest daughter and some of the older women now rush into the market, stealing merchandise from the stalls and placing it in their baskets. This assault is often so quickly done that it is fairly successful. The raiders then join the other mourners at the assembly point, where with bowed heads they listen respectfully while the chief drummer recites the genealogy of the *keema* and tells him that the people from the surrounding villages